

# Belize

## Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

An estimated 6.3 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years were counted as working in Belize in 2001. Approximately 8.1 percent of all boys ages 5 to 14 years were working compared to 4.6 percent of girls in the same age group. The majority of working children were found in the agricultural sector (55.3 percent), followed by services (38.8 percent), and manufacturing (3.6 percent) in 2001.<sup>356</sup> Approximately 74.6 percent of working children are found in rural regions,<sup>357</sup> where they work on family plots and in family businesses after school, on weekends and during vacations.<sup>358</sup> They also work in citrus, banana, and sugar fields.<sup>359</sup> In urban areas, children shine shoes, sell food, crafts, and other small items, and work in markets.<sup>360</sup> Teenage girls, many of whom have migrated from Honduras and other neighboring Central American countries, are reported to work as barmaids and prostitutes.<sup>361</sup>

Belize is considered a transit and destination country for children trafficked for sexual exploitation.<sup>362</sup> Girls are also trafficked internally for commercial exploitation and pornography. The practice of minors engaging in prostitution with older men in exchange for clothing, jewelry, or school fees and books is reported to occur throughout the country.<sup>363</sup> It is also reported that some instances of child sexual exploitation and trafficking are arranged by family members.<sup>364</sup>

Education in Belize is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 14 years.<sup>365</sup> In 2001, 93.2 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years were attending school.<sup>366</sup> The Education Act subjects parents to a fine of up to USD 100 if their children of compulsory school age fail to attend school regularly.<sup>367</sup> Primary education is free, but related expenses, such as uniforms and books, are a financial strain on poor families.<sup>368</sup> Secondary schools

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<sup>356</sup> UCW analysis of ILO SIMPOC, UNICEF MICS, and World Bank surveys, *Child Economic Activity and School Attendance Rates*, October 7, 2005. Reliable data on the worst forms of child labor are especially difficult to collect given the often hidden or illegal nature of the worst forms, such as the use of children in the illegal drug trade, prostitution, pornography, and trafficking. As a result, statistics and information on children's work in general are reported in this section. Such statistics and information may or may not include the worst forms of child labor. For more information on the definition of working children and other indicators used in this report, please see the "Data Sources and Definitions" section of this report.

<sup>357</sup> Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labor (SIMPOC) and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour in Belize: A Statistical Report*, ILO, 2003, xix; available from [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/belize/report/be\\_natl.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/belize/report/be_natl.pdf). See also ILO-IPEC SIMPOC, *Child Labour and Education in Belize: A Situational Assessment and In-depth Analysis*, ILO, June 2003, ix; available from [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/belize/report/be\\_depth.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/belize/report/be_depth.pdf).

<sup>358</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2004: Belize*, Washington, DC, February 28, 2005, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41749.htm>.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

<sup>362</sup> Girls are trafficked to Belize primarily from Central America. See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Washington, DC, June 3, 2005; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005/46612.htm>.

<sup>363</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Belize*, Section 5.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid. See also U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*.

<sup>365</sup> *Education Act*, Chapter 36, (April 24, 1991), Section 2(b); available from <http://www.belizelaw.org/lawadmin/index2.html>.

<sup>366</sup> UCW analysis of ILO SIMPOC, UNICEF MICS, and World Bank surveys, *Child Economic Activity and School Attendance Rates*.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., Section 37.

<sup>368</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Belize*, Section 5. See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding Observations: Belize*, March 31, 2005, para. 60; available from [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/15d955c522246114c125702100421174/\\$FILE/G0540865.pdf](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/15d955c522246114c125702100421174/$FILE/G0540865.pdf).

and apprenticeship and vocational programs can only accommodate one-half of children who complete primary school.<sup>369</sup> In 2002, the gross primary enrollment rate was 122 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 99 percent.<sup>370</sup> Gross and net enrollment ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and therefore do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. As of 1999, 81 percent of children enrolled in primary school were likely to reach grade 5.<sup>371</sup> Results from the Child Activity Survey indicate that 12 percent of working children ages 5 to 14 years do not attend school.<sup>372</sup>

## Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Act of Belize sets the minimum age for work as 12, 14, and 16 years in different sections of the text, and has been criticized as being unclear.<sup>373</sup> According to the Labor Act, children ages 12 to 14 years may only participate in light work that is not harmful to life, health, or education; only after school hours and for a total of 2 hours on a school day or Sunday; and only between the hours of 6 a.m. and 8 p.m.<sup>374</sup> The Labor Act applies to all employment in the formal sector, but not to self-employment or employment by family members.<sup>375</sup> The minimum age for employment near hazardous machinery is 17 years.<sup>376</sup> The Labor Act sets penalties for non-compliance with minimum age standards at USD 20 or 2 months of imprisonment for the first offense, and in the case of subsequent offenses, USD 50 or 4 months of imprisonment.<sup>377</sup>

The Families and Children Act prohibits children (defined in this Act as persons below 18 years of age) from employment in activities that may be detrimental to their health, education, or mental, physical, or moral development.<sup>378</sup> Forced and bonded labor are prohibited in Belize under the Constitution.<sup>379</sup> Although there is no law establishing a minimum age for conscription into the military, the minimum age for voluntary enrollment is 18 years.<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Belize*, Section 5.

<sup>370</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://wtatus.uis.unesco.org/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=51> (Gross and Net Enrollment Ratios, Primary; accessed December 2005). For an explanation of gross primary enrollment and/or attendance rates that are greater than 100 percent, please see the definitions of gross primary enrollment rate and gross primary attendance rate in the glossary of this report.

<sup>371</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://wtatus.uis.unesco.org/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=55> (School life expectancy, % of repeaters, survival rates; accessed December 2005).

<sup>372</sup> ILO-IPEC SIMPOC, *Child Labour and Education in Belize*, ix.

<sup>373</sup> For example, Section 169 of the Labor Act, which is the most explicit section on minimum age, states that “no child shall be employed so long as he is under the age of twelve years.” On the other hand, Section 164 of the same Act states that “no one shall employ a child” and a child is defined as anyone under the age of 14. See SIMPOC and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour in Belize: A Qualitative Study*, ILO, February 2003, 11; available from [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/belize/report/be\\_qual.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/belize/report/be_qual.pdf). See also *Labour Act*, Chapter 297, (December 31, 2000), Section 169; available from <http://www.belizelaw.org/lawadmin/index2.html>.

<sup>374</sup> *Labour Act*, Section 169. See also U.S. Embassy- Belize, *reporting*, August 19, 2003.

<sup>375</sup> U.S. Embassy- Belize, *reporting*, July 6, 2000. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Belize*, Section 6d.

<sup>376</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Belize*, Section 6d.

<sup>377</sup> *Labour Act*, Section 172.

<sup>378</sup> *Families and Children Act, Revised Edition*, (December 31, 2000), Part I, Articles 2(a), 7; available from <http://www.belizelaw.org/lawadmin/PDF%20files/cap173.pdf>.

<sup>379</sup> *Constitution of Belize*, (1981), Article 8(2); available from

<http://www.georgetown.edu/LatAmerPolitical/Constitutions/Belize/belize.html>. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Belize*, Section 6c.

<sup>380</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, “Belize,” in *Global Report 2004*; available from [http://www.child-soldiers.org/document\\_get.php?id=810](http://www.child-soldiers.org/document_get.php?id=810).

The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act punishes trafficking offenses with fines of up to USD 5,000 and imprisonment of up to 8 years.<sup>381</sup> Traffickers can also be prosecuted under immigration and abduction laws. The Criminal Code prohibits procuring a female for sexual exploitation within or outside of Belize and provides for 5 years of imprisonment for the crime. Penalties for abduction range from two years to life imprisonment, depending on the age and gender of the victim and the intent of the perpetrator. Abduction of a female with intent to marry or “carnally know her, or to cause her to be married or carnally known...” is punishable by 13 years of imprisonment.<sup>382</sup> The Criminal Code also prohibits sex with a female child younger than 14 years, and provides for a penalty of 12 years to life imprisonment. The sentence for the same act with a girl aged 14 to 16 years is 5 to 10 years of imprisonment.<sup>383</sup>

Inspectors from the Departments of Labor and Education enforce child labor and school attendance regulations.<sup>384</sup> Ministry of Education officials investigate complaints of truancy and some forms of child labor. The National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NOPCAN) receives complaints on the worst forms of child labor and refers them to the Department of Human Services and the police.<sup>385</sup> The Department of Human Services is legally empowered to handle the protection of child labor victims.<sup>386</sup> A newly created unit within the Belize Immigration Department is charged with investigating trafficking cases.<sup>387</sup>

## Current Government Policies and Programs to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government of Belize has a National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC), which works with the National Human Advisory Committee to monitor the implementation of the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents (2004-2015).<sup>388</sup> The National Plan includes objectives, strategies, and activities intended to promote the development of children and adolescents in the areas of health, education, child labor and protection, family, HIV/AIDS and culture.<sup>389</sup> The Ministries of Human Development, Labor, and Local Government head a sub-committee under the NCFC that deals with issues

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments		
Ratified Convention 138	3/6/2000	✓
Ratified Convention 182	3/6/2000	✓
ILO-IPEC Member		✓
National Plan for Children		✓
National Child Labor Action Plan		
Sector Action Plan		

<sup>381</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Belize*, Section 5. Anti-trafficking law includes provisions for victim assistance; however, according to the U.S. State Department, a lack of resources and capacity limits these efforts. See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*.

<sup>382</sup> *Criminal Code, Chapter 101*, (Amended May 31, 2003), Sections 49,55-56 [cited June 29, 2005]; available from <http://www.belize.gov.bz/lawadmin/index2.html>.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, Section 47.

<sup>384</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Belize*, Section 6d. School Attendance Officers are tasked with ensuring that parents meet compulsory education laws. See *Education Act*, Sections 38-40.

<sup>385</sup> Wendel D.J. Parham, Executive Director of Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute, letter to USDOL official, September 9, 2002.

<sup>386</sup> The department is part of the Ministry of Human Development and Housing. See Belize Labour Commissioner, electronic communication to USDOL official, August 26, 2005.

<sup>387</sup> U.S. Embassy- Belize, *reporting*, January 24, 2005.

<sup>388</sup> Statement at the UN Special Session on Children, May 10, 2002; available from <http://www.un.org/ga/children/belizeE.htm>.

<sup>389</sup> Belize Labour Commissioner, electronic communication, August 26, 2005. See also UNICEF, *Unity in Belize: parties endorse plan for kids*, [online] September 7, 2004 [cited November 8, 2005]; available from [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_23431.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_23431.html).

of child labor.<sup>390</sup> With funding from the Canadian government, ILO-IPEC worked with the Government of Belize to implement two regional projects to combat the worst forms of child labor,<sup>391</sup> and a pilot project to withdraw and rehabilitate children engaged in the worst forms of child labor in subsistence and commercial agriculture in Belize.<sup>392</sup> This year, the Government of Belize began participating in a USDOL-funded regional project implemented by ILO-IPEC to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children.<sup>393</sup> The government airs public service announcements and publishes newspaper ads to raise awareness of child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, and has a National Task Force to oversee efforts to combat trafficking.<sup>394</sup>

The Government of Belize is implementing a 10-year Education Sector Strategy to achieve universal access to education for children ages 3 to 16 years.<sup>395</sup> The government continues to offer tuition grants to primary and secondary school students and maintains a textbook lending program.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> The multi-sectoral committee includes members from the Ministries of Labor, Human Development, Education, and Health, members from the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Immigration Department, the Police Department, the National Trade Union Congress of Belize, the Association of General Managers of Primary Schools and the Central Statistical Office. See U.S. Embassy- Belize, *reporting*, September 1, 2004. See also ILO Sub-regional office for the Caribbean, *National child labour committees*, [online] 2005 [cited June 29, 2005]; available from <http://www.ilocarib.org.tt/childlabour/committees.htm>.

<sup>391</sup> The regional projects are scheduled to closed December 31, 2005. ILO-IPEC Geneva official, email communication to USDOL official, May 12, 2004.

<sup>392</sup> The pilot project was closed in November 2005. See ILO Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean, *Combating Child Labor in the Caribbean: Pilot Programs*, [online] 2005 [cited June 29, 2005]; available from [http://www.ilocarib.org.tt/childlabour/pilot\\_programme.htm](http://www.ilocarib.org.tt/childlabour/pilot_programme.htm).

<sup>393</sup> ILO-IPEC, *Contribution to the Prevention and Elimination of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Central America, Panama and the Dominican Republic Addendum*, project document, RLA/05/P52/USA, September 2005.

<sup>394</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Belize*, Section 5. See also U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*.

<sup>395</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding Observations*, para. 60.

<sup>396</sup> SIMPOC and the Central Statistical Office of the Government of Belize, *Child Labour in Belize: A Qualitative Study*, 17-18.